

ZONING COMMITTEE STAFF REPORT

FILES # 12-220122 and 14-098309

1. **APPLICANT:** Metropolitan State University **HEARING DATE:** 3/13/14
 2. **TYPE OF APPLICATION:** Site Plan Review and Variance
 3. **LOCATION:** 400 Maria
 4. **PIN & LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** See survey
 5. **PLANNING DISTRICT:** District 4 (Dayton's Bluff) **PRESENT ZONING:** B2
 6. **ZONING CODE REFERENCE:** 61.402.c, 61.106 and 63.305
 7. **STAFF REPORT DATE:** 3/6/14 **BY:** Tom Beach
 8. **DATE RECEIVED:** 1/28/14 **DEADLINE FOR ACTION:** 3/27/14
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A. PURPOSE:

- Site plan review for a new parking ramp and a surface parking lot.
- Variance to reduce the width of the parking spaces in the parking ramp (but not the parking lot) from 9' to 8.5'.

B. PARCEL SIZE: 4.9 acres (215,000 square feet)

C. EXISTING LAND USE: Surface parking lot.

D. SURROUNDING LAND USE:

North: Commercial (T2 and B3)
East: Vacant land (T2) and Residential (RT1)
South: Residential (RT1)
West: Metro State Campus (B2)

E. ZONING CODE CITATION: Required findings for site plan review are listed in Section 61.402.c. and discussed in Section H of the staff report. Minimum dimensions for parking spaces are listed in Section 63.305. Required findings for variances are listed in Section 61.601 and discussed in Section J of the staff report.

F. PROJECT HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION: Metro State previously submitted a site plan for a larger ramp with entrances on 6th and 7th Street. After a number of neighborhood meetings, Metropolitan State University revised the site plan and this is the plan that is under review now.

The site plan calls for replacing an existing surface parking lot with a new parking ramp and parking lot.

- The ramp would have approximately 760 spaces located between Bates and Maria. The surface parking lot south of the ramp would have approximately 80 spaces.

- The ramp would be 5 levels tall on the west side (facing the University campus across Maria;) and all of the levels would be above grade. The ramp would have 4 levels on the east side (facing Bates) but only two of these levels would be above grade because the site is higher at the east end.
- The ramp is intended to be used just by Metro State students, staff and visitors. It is not intended for use by the general public.
- The main entrance to the ramp would be from Maria with another entrance on Bates. The parking lot would not have a separate driveway and would be accessed through the parking ramp.
- The ramp would setback approximately:
 - 110' from East 7th Street (on the north)
 - 130' from 6th Street (on the south)
 - 16' from Bates (on the east side.)
 - 127' from Maria (on the west side)
- The parking spaces in the ramp would be 8.5' wide.

(Metropolitan State University owns two houses at the southeast corner of the block and is trying to acquire the third house. Once they acquire all the houses, they will apply to rezone them from RT1 to B2 and expand the surface parking lot into this area. A plan showing this was submitted for information but final approval of this plan cannot be given until these properties are rezoned and the site plan for the expanded lot is not under review by the Planning Commission at this time.)

- G. **DISTRICT COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION AND OTHER CORRESPONDENCE:** On February 4, 2014 the the Dayton's Bluff Land Use Committee passed a motion in support of
- The current design and siting of the university's parking ramp project
 - The variance request to make the parking ramp stall width 8.5 feet wide instead of 9 feet.

(A copy of Dayton's Bluff's letter is attached.)

As of 3/6/14 no other letters in support or opposition had been submitted.

FINDINGS AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR THE METRO STATE PARKING RAMP SITE PLAN

- H. **FINDINGS:** Section 62.108(c) of the Zoning Code says that in "order to approve the site plan, the planning commission shall consider and find that the site plan is consistent with" the findings listed below.

1. *Applicable ordinances of the City of Saint Paul.*

The site plan meets all applicable ordinances, including height and setbacks, if a variance for the width of the parking spaces in the ramp is approved

2. *The city's adopted comprehensive plan and development or project plans for sub-areas of the city.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. East 7th is designated as a Mixed-Use Corridor in the Comprehensive Plan (2010). The Plan supports a mix of uses on Mixed-Use Corridors (LU Policy 1.24).

Mixed-Use Corridors may be either predominately residential or predominately commercial. Predominately residential corridors will have smaller scale commercial uses, while predominately commercial corridors will have housing interspersed with commercial office uses and retail goods and services. The ramp and student center are examples of a mix of uses along the East 7th Street corridor. It promotes conditions that support those who live and work along Mixed-Use Corridors, including frequent transit services (LU Policy 1.28). The ramp and student center, "Provide connections by bicycle and pedestrian facilities to adjacent areas," as stated in LU Policy 1.27.

The work conducted by the University on the ramp and student center are also prime examples of working with anchors, business and property owners to "develop and maintain placemaking elements and community gathering spaces at visible places along the East 7th Street Corridor." Metropolitan State University has worked closely with the community to identify open space on East 7th and to provide for public space in the development. This goal was highlighted in the Near East Side Roadmap (2012) as part of Real Estate Objective RE2.4.

3. *Preservation of unique geologic, geographic or historically significant characteristics of the city and environmentally sensitive areas.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. The existing parking lot does not have any unique geologic, geographic characteristics and it is not an environmentally sensitive area.

The site is not in a historic preservation district, but the Dayton's Bluff Heritage Preservation District is to the east across Bates. The façade of the ramp facing Bates is only two stories high and has been designed to complement the architecture of the campus buildings.

4. *Protection of adjacent and neighboring properties through reasonable provision for such matters as surface water drainage, sound and sight buffers, preservation of views, light and air, and those aspects of design which may have substantial effects on neighboring land uses.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding.

- Stormwater will be directed to City storm sewers.
- The site will have landscaping to provide sound and sight buffers. The façade of the ramp will also include screening to block headlights from shining out into the surrounding residential neighborhood.
- The setbacks and height of the ramp will preserve views, light and air.
- The façade has been designed to complement the architecture of the campus buildings.

5. *The arrangement of buildings, uses and facilities of the proposed development in order to assure abutting property and/or its occupants will not be unreasonably affected.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding.

The parking ramp is set back over 100 feet from adjacent streets on the all sides except the Bates (east side) to reduce its impact. On the Bates side, the ramp is set back 16' but it two levels are below grade so that only two levels are above grade.

The main access is located on Maria, in the middle of the campus to minimize impact on neighboring properties. A second entrance is located on Bates.

6. *Creation of energy-conserving design through landscaping and location, orientation and elevation of structures.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. Landscaping will be provided to shade the parking lot. A parking ramp reduces heat gain compared to a parking lot with the same number of cars because the parking spaces on the lower levels are not exposed to direct sun. A parking ramp also uses less land than a parking lot, which allows for denser development which can ultimately encourage the use of alternative means of transportation.

7. *Safety and convenience of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic both within the site and in relation to access streets, including traffic circulation features, the locations and design of entrances and exits and parking areas within the site.*

Traffic is a major consideration because the parking ramp will have significantly more parking spaces than the existing parking lot.

A detailed Traffic Impact Study was submitted by the Metro State and approved by Public Works. The Study was also reviewed and approved by MnDOT because East 7th Street is a State Trunk Highway and Mounds Boulevard is a U.S. Highway. Public Works and MnDOT have indicated that the site plan can be approved subject to some minor final adjustments.

The current site plan has a number of changes from the earlier plan that are intended to address traffic concerns:

- The current plan has fewer parking spaces than an earlier plan.
- A new right-turn lane has been recommended in the Traffic Impact Study as a mitigation strategy to alleviate traffic issues resulting from the addition of ramp traffic to the system per the traffic model. The right-turn lane, proposed for eastbound Mounds Boulevard between 6th Street and the freeway entrance to I94, would need to be reviewed by MnDOT because Mounds Boulevard is a U.S. Highway.
- Maria is located between the ramp and the main campus. Metro State wants to install traffic calming measures on Maria Avenue between East 7th Street and East 6th Street so that the avenue becomes more of a "pedestrian mall" as opposed to a through route for vehicular traffic to access the signal at East 7th Street. The measures are intended to divert through traffic while maintaining access to Cabonne's Pizza, the ramp and emergency traffic. It is anticipated that not all through traffic will be diverted. Metropolitan State University is working with Public Works staff on the design of the traffic calming elements being proposed for Maria. Possible improvements being considered include:
 - Curb extensions (bump outs) at E. 6th Street and at E. 7th Street.
 - Marked midblock crosswalks on a speed table. Final configuration of any

speed table/crosswalk will need City approval.

- Landscaped center median to give the feeling of a narrower roadway and well as dissuading pedestrians from crossing at unmarked/unfavorable spots and with breaks for driveways and pedestrian designated and marked crossings
- Include markings on the pavement for bikes as called for in the City's draft bikeways plan
- Configure the driveway to the visitor lot driveway to encourage exit toward E. 6th Street
- Could configuring the driveway of parking ramp driveway to discourage exit toward E. 7th Street

Therefore, the site plan is consistent with this finding if:

- A new right-turn lane is added on Mounds Boulevard if it is determined to be needed once the ramp is operational.
- Metropolitan State University continues to work with Public Works on the design of traffic calming measures on Maria and implements these measures prior to the opening of the parking ramp.
- The site plan obtains approval from MnDOT and Public Works

8. *The satisfactory availability and capacity of storm and sanitary sewers, including solutions to any drainage problems in the area of the development.*

The sewer and stormwater system for the ramp has been designed to also handle stormwater from the student center that is proposed to be built immediately north of the ramp. (The student center is going through its own site plan review.)

The stormsewer system includes a large stormwater infiltration system under a plaza to be built on the west of the ramp. This system is intended to meet standards for stormwater rate control and water quality.

Public Work Sewer Division has reviewed the site plan and recommends approval subject to some minor revisions.

Capitol Region Watershed must approve the plans. They will be meeting about the project in the near future. Based on their review so far, it is anticipated that the plans will meet the Watershed's standards subject to some possible minor revisions.

The site plan is consistent with this finding for sewers and stormwater if it is approved by Saint Paul Public Works and the Capitol Region Watershed District.

9. *Sufficient landscaping, fences, walls and parking necessary to meet the above objectives.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. The proposed landscaping for the ramp and parking lot includes trees and shrubs around the perimeter and within the parking lot. The existing ornamental metal fence will be used around the parking lot.

10. *Site accessibility in accordance with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including parking spaces, passenger loading zones and accessible routes.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. Parking spaces and accessible routes are

provided in the ramp and the surface parking lot consistent with the standards of the ADA.

11. *Provision for erosion and sediment control as specified in the Ramsey Erosion Sediment and Control Handbook.*

The site plan is consistent with this finding. It calls for using standard measures during construction to control erosion and sediment.

City staff has reviewed plan and found that the erosion/sediment control plans are sufficient. The site plans are also being reviewed by the Capitol Region Watershed District. A condition of approval of the site plan should be approval by the Capitol Region Watershed District.

- I. **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Based on the findings above, the staff recommends approval of the site plan subject to the following conditions:
1. The site plan must obtain final approval Saint Paul Public Works. As part of this:
 - A new right-turn lane must be added on Mounds Boulevard if MnDOT and Public Work determine that it is needed once the ramp is operational.
 - Metropolitan State University must continue to work with Public Works on the design of traffic calming measures on Maria and implement these measures prior to the opening of the parking ramp.
 2. The stormwater drainage system must be approved by the Capitol Region Watershed District and Saint Paul Public Works Sewer Division.
 3. A variance to reduce the width of the parking spaces from 9' to 8.5' must be approved.

FINDINGS AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR THE METRO STATE PARKING RAMP VARIANCE

J. **FINDINGS:** The following findings must be met in order to approve a variance to reduce the width of parking spaces in the ramp to 8.5'.

1. *The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code.*

This finding is met. By reducing the width of the parking stalls, the ramp can be smaller and still provide enough parking to meet the needs of Metropolitan State University. A smaller ramp will reduce its visual impact on the surrounding area and this is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the zoning code.

The zoning code allows angle parking spaces to be 8.5' wide and this is wide enough for most cars to park and open their doors etc. However, the code requires perpendicular parking spaces to be wider - 9'. The main reason for this is to make it easier for cars to maneuver in and out of the parking spaces with a 20' drive lane. However, this ramp would have drive lanes that are 24' wide and these wider drive lanes will allow cars to maneuver into and out of the narrower parking spaces.

The zoning code would allow the college to have the same number of parking spaces by designating half of the spaces for compact cars only (8' wide) and half of the spaces as standard spaces (9' wide). However full size cars often park in compact spaces intended for compact cars and having all of the spaces 8.5' wide avoids this.

2. *The variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan.*

This finding is met. The variance is in keeping with the goals of the comprehensive plans for the area. Reducing the width of the parking stall allows for more spaces within a smaller structure, allowing more green space to be created outside of the facility, fronting on East 7th Street. Public open space is one of the objectives in the Near East Side Roadmap (2012) as part of Real Estate Objective RE2.4.

3. *The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provision that the property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the provision. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.*

This finding is met. The practical difficulty in this case is building a parking ramp that meets the needs of Metropolitan State University but fits into the surrounding neighborhood. Permitting smaller parking spaces will help make this possible.

4. *The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.*

This finding is met. Metropolitan University is a large institution and its attendance is increasing. More parking for students and staff is required to accommodate this. The area available for parking is near residential area and a local historic district and a smaller ramp will fit in better with the neighborhood. These are circumstances unique to the property that were not created by the landowner.

5. *The variance will not permit any use that is not allowed in the zoning district where the affected land is located.*

This finding is met. An accessory parking ramp and parking lot are permitted uses.

6. *The variance will not alter the essential character of the surrounding area.*

This finding is met. The variance will allow the ramp to be slightly smaller than if the parking spaces were all the standard size. This will help the ramp fit into the character of the surrounding area.

- K. **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Based on the findings above, the staff recommends approval of the variance to reduce the width of parking spaces in the ramp from 9' to 8.5'.

February 4, 2014

Mr. Tom Beach
DSI
375 Jackson Street
Suite 220
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1806

Dear Mr. Beach;

On February 4, 2014 after thoughtful discussion, the Dayton's Bluff Land Use Committee passed a motion in support of the following:

- Support the current design and siting of the university's parking ramp project
- Support the university's variance request to make the parking ramp stall width 8 1/2 feet wide instead of 9 feet. "

Members present:

Sage Holben, Jean Comstock, Karin DuPaul, Colin Wilkinson, Angela DuPaul, David Durant, Ashlee Olds

Thirty other neighborhood participants were part present at this discussion.

We all agree that the communication and attention to details on this project is important; and that MSU is doing their due diligence. We are looking forward to working with them in an ongoing process between the businesses and neighbors in all aspects of business operating within Dayton's Bluff.

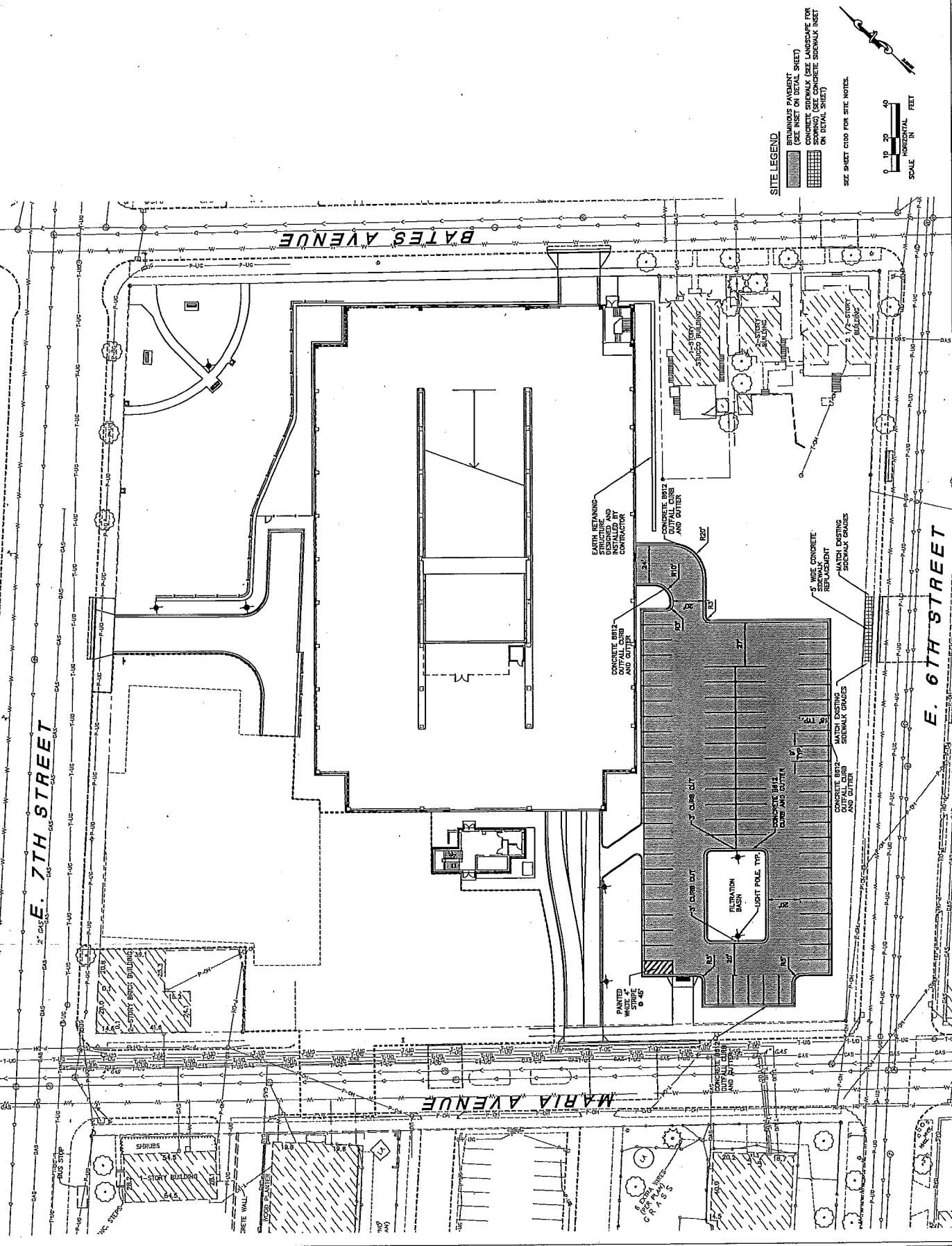
If you have any questions feel free to call me at 651-772-2075

Thank you.

Sincerely, Tabitha Benci DeRango

Dayton's Bluff Community Council
Project coordinator
Tabitha@daytonsbluff.org

Copy to:
Dan Hambrock, Metropolitan State
Ellen Biales, CM Lantry's Office



3/6/4

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E. 6TH STREET